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Is There a Soviet Mole in U.S. Intelligence?

By PETER BRIMELOW

Recently, an FBI man called me to check into the background of a former colleague of mine being considered for a government post. He asked about the colleague's habits (irreproachable) and whether he associated with any bad characters (only professional politicians). He asked vaguely whether I had any reason to suppose my colleague would be disloyal to the U.S. His most specific question was whether my colleague had ever said anything derogatory about racial or ethnic minorities — a surprise, since when I last looked this wasn't illegal.

I suspect these priorities are due for a change. Like the distant drummer heard on a drowsy summer's day, the issue of internal security is discreetly but insistently tapping its way into America's political consciousness.

A lot of people do not want to be disturbed by this noise, and many others honestly have no idea what it is. But 35 years have elapsed since Sen. Joseph McCarthy made his first famous speech on subversives in the State Department, and 31 since the condemnation by his Senate colleagues that, although on a minor point, is generally regarded as the end of his career.

The traumas of one generation cannot indefinitely inhibit the next. And, with the recent wave of Americans caught spying for the Russians, there's quite enough evidence accumulating to suggest we are about to relearn the old lesson about eternal vigilance being the price of liberty.

No episode in American political history has been more distorted than the internal-security scandals that followed World War II. Even the simplest facts have to be restated.

McCarthy was not the first, the last, nor in many ways the most important of those investigating subversion. He never served on the congressional committees that, under both Democratic and Republican chairmen, held the majority of the key hearings. He did not even have the power to conduct his own investigations until the Republicans briefly took control of the Seante in January 1953.

Moreover, McCarthy did not invent the subversion issue. There were spies and security risks in Washington, a consequence of the Roosevelt Administration's relaxed attitude toward domestic communism and the Soviet Union during the New Deal and World War II.

The tortuous saga of Alger Hiss, the spy in the State Department, had culminated in his conviction for perjury in early 1950 — before McCarthy ever opened his mouth.

During the Hiss case other startling revelations had occurred, including, for example, the fact that a Soviet ring had operated in the Treasury Department under the leadership of Assistant Secretary Harry Dexter White, materially affecting U.S. policy toward Nationalist China. Liberal politicians and their press allies had sweepingly and systematically dismissed all such possibilities. Their credibility was completely shattered.

Exactly the same political preconditions exist today as in the late 1940s. Subversion, like AIDS, is a disease that manifests symptoms only many years after the activities that caused it.

A generation of radical activism on the campuses, as in the 1930s and 1960s, inexorably leads to the emergence of subversives in high places some 20 years later, as the infected age group marches up its various career paths. In a (possibly) more innocent sense, this has already happened in Britain. There, the capture of college Labour clubs by Marxists in the 1960s presaged the identical seizure of the Labour party in the 1980s.

Along with the rise of the radical 1960s' generation, U.S. internal-securities safeguards disintegrated in a national regression to New Deal complacency. Once again, anti-communism was unfashionable. Domestic surveillance was severely cut back under pressure from congressional critics like the late Sen. Frank Church, and there were far-reaching and complicated changes within the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) that apparently almost eliminated its counterintelligence capacity. So radical were these changes, in fact, that an extraordinary but little-noticed public feud has broken out in which supporters of the former CIA counterintelligence chief, James Jesus Angleton, have publicly accused the former director, William Colby, of being in effect a Soviet "mole." Colby has retaliated in kind.

Conventional wisdom has it that, unlike the 1930s, contemporary American traitors are motivated not by ideology but by greed. This indeed is sometimes the case, as apparently with the Walker-family Navy spy ring. But to imagine that the baby boomers were somehow ideologically immunized would be to swaddle that most romanticized of generations in yet another indulgent myth.

A Norwegian baby boomer, Arne Treholt, the top civil servant recently arrested as a Soviet agent, was converted to Marxism as a student protesting the Vietnam War. He will certainly have American counterparts.

Ideological spies are typically more difficult to catch because they tend to become "agents of influence" like Harry Dexter White, rather than simple secret-stealers. Yet, as John Rees has pointed out in a recent issue of his exclusive $1,000-a-year international-intelligence newsletter *Early Warning* (P.O. Box 1523, Washington, D.C. 20013), the *primary objective* of Soviet intelligence is not espionage as such but "to penetrate more deeply," as Lenin put it, "into the enemy's *plans*."

What finally woke America up in the 1940s was the defection of key Soviet officials — above all, Igor Gouzenko, the cipher clerk in the Soviet Embassy in Ottawa, whose testimony was crucial to the investigations that led to Hiss. And here too, history is repeating itself.

In 1984 alone, there were at least three important Soviet defectors. One

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of them, the former KGB station chief in London, is supposed to know scores of "agents of influence" in British society. The defection and "redefection" of Vitaly Yurchenko, which could hardly have surprised those in the intelligence community who said from the first that he was a disinformation ploy, may well have been a Soviet effort to poison this particular source of Western intelligence.

The final contemporary parallel with the subversion cycle beginning in the 1930s is the institutionalized disbelief with which evidence of espionage is greeted. It's tempting to see "agents of influence" at work here. But the most powerful motive may well be the desire of governments everywhere to avoid trouble.

This fits in well with the opinion of the CIA that is widespread among its putative allies, the Washington conservatives. They regard it as a bureaucratic drone, concerned only to protect its personnel and to avoid disturbing the official consensus. Ominously, there were similar complaints about the British security services — before the discovery of their fatal penetration. ■

Mr. Brimelow notes that "ideological spies are typically more difficult to catch because they tend to become 'agents of influence' like Harry Dexter White" (above).